

Admiral Mike Mullen,
Podcast Transcript for 01 June 2007

MC1 MCNEELEY: Welcome to the Chief of Naval Operations podcast for June 4th, 2007. I'm Petty Officer Chad McNeeley. This is the first in a series of discussions with CNO Admiral Mike Mullen. Topics will include subjects such as CNO initiatives, personnel issues, and current events. To begin, Admiral Mullen will explain why these podcasts are an important tool to communicate his message.

(Music plays.)

ADM. MULLEN: Well, this, I hope, is an ongoing – part of an ongoing conversation. One of the promises I made to myself when I came in as CNO was to look for new ways to have a conversation, not only with Navy personnel, but with America about what we're up to as a Navy. So it's personal ... anxious to make point-to-point communication work, sound of a person's voice can be more powerful than just the written word, so I'm really working hard to try to take advantage of the technology.

I use an iPod myself, have some feeling for its flexibility. Simple, easy, and quick to communicate what's on somebody's mind and convenient for people to listen to. There's a lot going on, busy, busy times, and this will allow me to help keep Sailors and their families up to date on a regular basis. So there just isn't any good reason to not do it, so we thought we'd give it a run.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Can I ask you what you have on your iPod, what you typically use it for?

ADM. MULLEN: What I typically use it for is books and I'm an avid reader when I have time. What I find, though, I've got a lot more opportunities to listen to an iPod and get through a good book than I do to sit down and read it. So that's where it's really, really been great for me.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Along with this podcasting, why is exploring this new media important to you and the Navy?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, there are – we are dealing these days with so many people who are connected to this technology. Some might call it the Internet Generation. And it's how a lot of people are staying informed. So we wanted to keep up, make it convenient for people to stay informed. The old ways of just launching a press release or sending out a naval message just won't work anymore; they're still important, but it's not enough.

We want to push the envelope of communications, reach out to places and people we haven't touched before. I've actually considered starting a blog; haven't gotten there, it takes a lot of time. Managing time is really a challenge. But the whole idea is to be able to connect in ways we haven't connected before with people that are into this kind of

communication.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Speaking of reaching out to new people and places, you've been doing a lot of traveling lately. You've been to Norfolk, Hawaii, fleet concentration areas; you've also been to some not so traditional places. Can you tell us a little bit more about where you've been and why you went to these countries?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, I like, in particular, the international travel; I'll talk about that first, but I love the phrase new faces and new places. And recently in Pakistan and India and they represent emerging countries and emerging allies, emerging friends that we need to support. My relationship with the heads of their Navy is a strong one. In fact, recently, the head of the Pakistan Navy visited here. So I return that visit. I expect later on this year to go to the Far East as well and haven't been there for a while, specifically to visit China and Vietnam. So I'm excited about that. We need to engage leadership, I think, around the world.

Also excited recently, was in Pensacola, seeing the fleet there. Had a session with almost 4,000 Sailors who were in training down there. It was a great engagement for myself and for the MCPON. We always learn things with the questions that come up in those sessions. What's on young Sailors' minds and we take back from those sessions things that we ask questions to try to figure out how to get it right for the Navy: could be uniforms, could be pay, could be policies that we've got in place that we need to really look at once they're in place and executing that we need to change. We get a lot of questions about education requirements for our senior chiefs over the next few years and MCPON has led the charge looking at whether we should adjust the policy and I'm giving that serious consideration.

So lots of – there's been a lot of travel; about a third of my time is travel. And I get a lot out of face-to-face discussions, whether they're individual or group, it's a forum that I hope has an impact with those that I see on the deck plates. And I don't think you can do – I don't think you can be CNO in the Navy and do it from Washington. You've got to get out and see what's going on out there.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Is there anything in particular of these visits that you remember specifically, a question, or an attitude that made such an impact that – I mean, besides all of it, all these obviously impactful, but a place or a question that really hit home that maybe wasn't focused on?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, I've made several trips to Iraq. We've got 5,000 Sailors on the ground in Iraq, over 12,000 Sailors actually on the ground supporting the efforts in the Central Command theater right now. And one of those first trips when I was CNO and went to Iraq, I was asked questions by a lot of Corpsmen, about their qualifications, about additional pay, about their career paths. And the 8404s who are the fleet Marine force Corpsmen, I didn't grow up with them, so I've learned a lot from them in my visits and about what they're doing. I've seen our leading edge explosive ordnance technicians over there who are very much leading the fight, and I am concerned about their

perstempo, their home tempo. Their pace is very, very high. I'm concerned about that issue, and so it's caused me to come back and look at how we balance that.

I travel a lot with my wife of over three decades and she spends time with spouses and she gets a lot of good questions with relation to things that are on family, spouse minds, and it could be child development centers or child care, it could be the challenges dealing with the whole issue individual augmentees. We've got about 13,000 of them. We're going to continue to have that many for a while. And there's a lot of uncertainty and angst associated with these, and we've had to make some significant changes in how we deal with families who are in situations where their husband or wife is an individual augmentee different from how we've done things in the past. So again, MCPON and I both learn a lot from these, and I just want to continue and encourage to ask those tough questions, because they really do have an impact throughout the Navy.

MC1. MCNEELEY: Going back to your travels to Iraq and Afghanistan, you talked about the war on terror. Can you give us an impression of the Navy's contribution to that war, particularly on the ground?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, we've got 60,000 Sailors who are deployed right now, almost 40 percent of the ships around the world, and the war on terror is a big part of this. Whether it's the Philippines or in the area in the Middle East, there's an awful lot that's going on around the world. And those 60,000 Sailors make a – and they're expeditionary Sailors. They're able to make a big difference in areas that we've been in traditionally and others that we haven't.

And, in particular, the 13,000 I talked about earlier who are on the ground in CentCom, and I've got almost as many – actually, I've got more Sailors at sea there, we've got two strike groups who are also supporting forces ashore, we've got our SEALs, we've got our docs, Corpsmen, and nurses ashore there who have just been spectacular, so many Sailors that are making a difference in roles both in the lead and in support. I mentioned our explosive ordnance technicians, I haven't said anything about our Seabees. You should see what our Seabees are doing worldwide, and particularly in Afghanistan and in Iraq.

We've also got several hundred Sailors who are in Djibouti, in the Horn of Africa, in that Joint Task Force. And that's where I think long term the war on terror takes us to engage early to prevent non-governed areas from becoming fertile grounds for terrorists. We're engaged in the Gulf of Guinea. We're engaged in South America at a level we haven't been before. We've got several hundred Sailors who are performing spectacularly in GITMO in a very, very challenging environment as well. So we've got Sailors contributing around the world and I'm proud of each and every one of them.

MC1 MCNEELEY: And staying in the Gulf region, there are a lot of Sailors at sea, we established that. Last week, we conducted an exercise and the media was calling it a show of force. Can you talk a little bit about that and was it designed to send a message to Iran?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, as I said earlier, we've got two carrier strikers there: the STENNIS and the NIMITZ. We've also got an expeditionary strike group of our amphibious ships. And it happened that schedule-wise, they were all in the same area at the same time. And so we took advantage of that, the opportunity, to get STENNIS and NIMITZ and BATAAN together so that they could exercise. We don't get many opportunities like that. And, yes, it was in the Arabian Gulf, obviously.

But the whole idea of naval forces out there is to be a deterrent, strong force. We've been in the Arabian Gulf since the late '40s; we're going to be there for the foreseeable future. So we understand the area. We're also there to show strong support for our friends in the area. And, clearly, it certainly could be, and has been, characterized a show of force. That was not the intent, but we're mindful of Iran, mindful of even their activity recently when they captured, they seized those British sailors and Marines. And so we know where we're operating, we know why we're operating there, and we do it from a position of strength and also to support our friends.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Very good. Any final thoughts that you'd like to add as far as the podcast is concerned?

ADM. MULLEN: No, I hope we can make this work and I hope people will listen to it. It's an opportunity to try to get the word out and hear it from me personally, and I hope I can hear back from any of you who might be listening to this on how we might do it better. And just to you, particularly Sailors and your family members, I can't say enough about how proud we are, how important your service is, and the support that your families give you and all of us is truly extraordinary and it's a real privilege to serve here. It's a great Navy and a really challenging time, and we look forward to continuing to excel as our Navy has.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Thank you very much, sir. I appreciate it.

ADM. MULLEN: Thank you.

(Music plays.)

MC1 MCNEELEY: You've been listening to the Chief of Naval Operations podcast for June 4th. Please check back again Monday, June 11th, for our next edition. I'm Petty Officer Chad McNeeley. Thank you for listening.

(Music plays.)

(END)